

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE - 22 MARCH 2010

REPORT ON: DEVELOPMENT OF FOSTERING AND ADOPTION SERVICES

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 146-2010

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to advise Committee of key issues during this last year within the Family Placement and Adoption Services and to make proposals as a response to these.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 It is recommended that the Committee:

2.1.1 Notes the ongoing pressures on the fostering service, and the projected overspend for 2009/10;

2.1.2 Approves the expansion of Dundee's internal fostering service to provide placements and support for an additional 10 children in order to reduce the number of external family placements.

2.1.3 Notes the proposal to increase the capacity of the family placement team by 1.41 full time equivalent Resource Worker posts to adequately support new and existing foster carers.

2.1.4 Notes the new requirement for an adoption support service and the proposed creation of 1 full time equivalent Social Worker post for this purpose.

2.1.5 Approves the annual fostering and adoption fee rates as noted in Appendix 2.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 Reducing the number of external fostering placements through providing an additional 10 in-house fostering placements will result in a net reduction of expenditure in the Social Work Departments Family Placement Budget of £252,000 (see Appendix 1). This reduction in expenditure together with the additional investment will assist in bringing family placement expenditure in line with the 2010/11 revenue budget.

3.2 The cost of establishing the posts as outlined in the report will be £89,000 in a full financial year. In addition, provision will be made for a sessional budget to carry out foster carer / adoption assessments at a cost of £15,000. These costs will be funded from additional funding allocated to the Social Work Departments Revenue Budget in 2010/11.

3.3 The cost of uprating and amending the fees and allowances as noted in Appendix 2 has been allowed for in the Social Work Revenue Budget 2010/11.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

4.1 The family placement budget has been under severe financial pressure over a number of years (see table below), which is a reflection of the increases in the numbers of Looked After Children, much of which correlates with increasing numbers of children who are adversely affected by parental substance misuse. In Dundee there has been an average annual increase in Looked After Children of 9% since 2002 and as at September 2009 the figure stood at 606 children. Approximately 30% of these children are fostered.

Table	Budget £000	Actual £000	Overspend £000
2007/08	3,597	4,275	678
2008/09	4,387	5,756	1,369
2009/10	5,039	6,225*	1,186

*(Projected)

The current budget for family placements is £5,039k for financial year 2009/10 and this is projected to be overspent by £1,186k in the current financial year. This budget pays for all fostering placements including placements with external fostering agencies, which are commissioned in circumstances when the Council's own resources are unable to meet the needs of a specific child at a specific time. This might be because of the nature of the child's needs or more typically when all available and suitable Dundee City Council foster placements are already committed.

The necessary increase in usage of external family placements has been the main contributing factor to the increased expenditure within the family placement budget, with expenditure rising from approximately £900k in 2007/08 to a projected spend in 2009/10 of approximately £2.3m

- 4.1 During 2009, there has been another rise in the numbers of children in external foster placements. Whilst the number dropped to 32 in April 2009, this has risen slowly during the year and as at 31st January 2010 has now reached 49. Costs in this area are significant, ranging from approx £670 per week up to £1590 per week, depending on the needs of the child and in particular their age. This payment includes the external agencies management costs and overheads - this is not what the carer receives. The fostering fee paid directly to a Dundee City Council foster carer is on average £314 per week. In the first 3 quarters of 2009/10 there have been 23, 26 and 24 admissions per quarter respectively to Dundee's own foster carers. The figures for admissions to external foster placements in these quarters were 0, 7 and 6. The majority of these admissions to external fostering were for young people aged 11-16 years of age, or sibling groups.
- 4.2 These figures reflect a sustained demand for fostering throughout this year, continuing the trends over the past several years of significant increases in the numbers of children placed in kinship care and foster care. This typically reflects the significant increase in the numbers of young children who are exposed to substance-misusing parents, but also Dundee's commitment to giving these vulnerable children a positive family life via kinship and foster care. Parental substance misuse has been the predominant characteristic of children where they cannot return home to their parents and where they need permanent substitute care.
- 4.3 "Best practice" in fostering suggests that the number of children within a fostering household is limited to ensure that the carer(s) can give the foster child adequate time, attention and care. Additionally, there are regulatory requirements which ensure placement numbers are appropriate to the carer's experience and capacity and that any deviation from the carer's approval (e.g. a temporary extra placement) is also subject to regulation.
- 4.4 The Adoption & Children (Scotland) Act 2007 and the Adoption Support Services and Allowances (Scotland) Regulations 2009 came into force on 28 September 2009. The new legislation places greater responsibilities on local authorities to provide adoption support services to a wider range of people affected by adoption. Report 587-2009 noted and approved a revised Adoption Allowance Scheme as part of the response to this legislation.

- 4.5 The duty to provide adoption support services lies initially with the agency making the adoptive placement. This duty ceases 3 years after the Adoption Order is granted (or when the child turns 18) when the duty transfers to the local authority where the person requesting the service lives. As a consequence of this new duty a new post of Adoption Support social worker will be created, to be the point of contact for all Dundee's adoption support requirements. Additionally, this post will add to the Social Work Department's capacity in responding to the increasing numbers of children who need permanent substitute care, through adoption or permanent fostering, due to child protection concerns.

While significant additional resources have been allocated to the Family Placement Budget in the 2010/11 Revenue Budget, this continuous level of investment to meet increasing demand is not sustainable in the medium to long term. A number of actions are proposed to reduce expenditure in this area, primarily through reducing the need to purchase more expensive external family placements.

5.0 KEY ACTIONS

- 5.1 The following actions continue to be taken to reduce Dundee's dependence on external agencies;

- Financial Scrutiny by Senior Management
- Permanence Implementation Plan
- Promotion of Kinship Care

- 5.2 However, in light of the ongoing shortfall in placements from Dundee's own service the following actions are proposed to ensure we can best meet our future needs from within our own resources, therefore reducing the costs of the family placement service overall

- 5.2.1 It is proposed to maintain and expand the Council's fostering service through;

- the creation of 4 new ACE (Alternative Community Experience for Young People) carer placements
- the creation of 6 additional Dundee City Council foster placements
- increasing Support costs equivalent to 1.41 full time equivalent Resource Worker Posts (0.41 of the post is a conversion of a post where the current part time postholder is due to retire in summer 2010)
- the creation of 1 full time equivalent Adoption Support Social Worker Post
- the creation of a sessional staff budget of £15,000 to carry out carers/adopter assessments
- uprating weekly carers fees and allowances as outlined in Appendix 1 (as in previous financial years)
- amending other allowances to align with the National Foster Network Rates

ACE carers are salaried, professional foster carers who require a qualification in working with children over the age of 9yrs or significant experience in working with children/young people. Dundee City Council introduced the ACE carers scheme in 1999 and currently has 7 ACE carers. The maximum cost of an ACE carer per week (in 2009/10) is £767 based on maximum age band of 16-18. The cost of a Dundee City Council foster carer ranges from £265 per week to £351 per week depending on the age of the child (2009/10 costs).

It is widely recognised that foster carers require support on an ongoing basis if they are to continue to provide care for children and to reduce the chances of placements breaking down. Increasing resource worker capacity within the family placement team is crucial to increasing support available to both existing and new foster carers. The creation of 1 full time equivalent Adoption Support post at Social Worker grade, is required to meet the new legislative requirements as outlined above for adoption support and to ensure children can be progressed timeously from temporary foster care through to adoptive placements. In order to cope with the demand for assessments of carers and adopters at peak times, it is proposed to establish a sessional staff budget to enable the Social Work Department to use its own staff on an additional sessional hours basis where possible, to

ensure we can constantly provide a prompt and efficient service to prospective carers/adopters. This will improve the recruitment process for foster carers and adopters and therefore help build capacity.

5.3 If the proposals outlined are approved, the following is a guide timetable for their implementation;

- April to May - initial recruitment of staff and carers
- May to August - induction, training and assessment of new carers; identification of children and young people who could be returned from external foster or residential placements
- August to November - placements with new carers begin to be made; further training for staff and carers

6.0 CONCLUSION

6.1 There are ongoing tensions between budgetary considerations, the need to secure value for money and the legal requirement to promote the best interests of children, including responding to the need to protect children and secure their welfare. The Council's aim continues to be to place a child in an external placement only when that placement is absolutely necessary. However, the aim of these proposals is to reduce the demand for external foster placement by ensuring that we have adequate in-house resources.

7.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This Report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty and Equality Impact Assessment.

There are no major issues.

8.0 CONSULTATIONS

The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services), and Director of Finance have been consulted in connection with the preparation of this report.

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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DATE: 5 March 2010

APPENDIX 1

Expansion of Dundee City Council's ACE Carers and Fostering Scheme

Annual Costs		No of Placements	Estimated Fee Rates 2010/11 £	Weeks *	Total Cost £
<i>Additional Costs of Allowances/Fees</i>					
ACE Carers:	Allowances (Age 11-15)	4	170.62	57	38,901
	Fees	4	569.58	52	118,472
	Total		740.19		157,373
Foster Carers:	Allowances (Age 11-15)	6	170.62	57	58,351
	Fees	6	148.17	52	46,228
	Total		318.78		104,579
Total Cost					261,952
Total Cost of External Placements		10	989.00	52	514,280
Total Full Year Saving					252,328

* Allowances are payable on the basis of 57 weeks per annum - 52 weeks annual plus additional 2 weeks for Summer Holidays, additional 2 weeks Christmas Allowances (as per Fostering Network recommendations) with an additional 1 weeks allowance provided within Dundee City Council's scheme for birthdays.

FOSTERING ALLOWANCES 2010/11

It is recommended that the undernoted rates for 2010/11 are paid, with effect from w/c 28th March 2010 (the first full week for fostering payment purposes for 2010/11): -

ACE Carer and FEE Carer fees

These fees, as previously agreed by the Social Work Committee, are linked to staff pay scales and therefore it is recommended that these are increased in line with the equivalent points on the 2010/11 pay scales once the pay award has been finalised.

Adoption Allowances (weekly)

It is recommended that Adoption Age Allowances are also increased in line with the 2010/11 staff pay scales.

Link and Residence Allowances

The amount paid is the equivalent of income support rates. It is recommended that these allowances are increased in line with increases in relevant income support rates (not yet announced).

Fostering Allowances

Fostering Allowances are linked closely to Fostering Network recommended fostering rates with the current rate equating to 95% of these rates. The Fostering Network has advised they are not recommending an inflationary uplift on these rates for 2010/11. However it is recommended that these allowances are increased by 1.25% in line with the budgeted provision which will further close the gap between Dundee City Council Rates and the Fostering Network Rates at 96%, with effect from w/c 28th March 2010 as noted below:

	2010/11 Weekly Rate	2009/10 Weekly Rate
	£	£
Age Allowance 00-04	120.32	118.83
Age Allowance 05-10	137.06	135.37
Age Allowance 11-15	170.62	168.51
Age Allowance 16-18	207.51	204.95

All Other Allowances

A number of other allowances are in place in addition to the age allowances noted above. These have been reviewed and in order to remain consistent with the Fostering Network Rates above and other considerations such as HMRC mileage rates. Accordingly, it is recommended that the mileage allowance is increased from 34p to 40p per mile, and the nappy allowance will cease to be paid as this should be included within the weekly fee as appropriate. It is also recommended that the holiday payment should increase from £12 to £15 per day (where a foster carer takes a foster child on holiday) and that the multi-placement allowance should be removed as it is no longer used. In order to encourage foster carers to consider increasing the number of children they look after, it is proposed to increase the maximum number of placements for which a retainer fee is paid from 2 to 4. This fee is equivalent to the weekly fee and is payable up to a maximum of 28 days in between placements. The financial implications of the above are cost neutral.

Therefore the following rates are recommended with effect from w/c 28th March 2010: -

Custody Age Allowance 05-10 £77.72 per week

Custody Age Allowance 11-15 £96.75 per week

Mileage 40p per mile

Adult Bus Pass £9.50 per week

Child Bus Pass £5.70 per week

Holiday Payment £15 per day